

Paper 11

Update on CWM Mission Support Programme proposal

Mission Committee

Church 2013
United
Church **Reformed**
Church Church 2013



Paper I1

Mission Committee: Update on CWM Mission Support Programme proposal

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Francis Brienen, Secretary for Mission francis.brienen@urc.org.uk
Action required	None – the Mission Committee will bring this matter to Mission Council for decision in 2014
Draft resolution(s)	
Alternative options to consider, if any	

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	The Council for World Mission (CWM) makes grants to all its 31 member churches according to an agreed budget through its Mission Support Programme. Each new funding round is designated as a new “phase” and the United Reformed Church is now in the process of discernment as to the best use of the grant, which is designated for strategic mission work and encourages the member churches to undertake new ventures addressing the challenges of their mission contexts.
Main points	After wide consultation, the Mission Committee agreed that its previous proposal for this grant should be altered. This paper gives the full background and explains why the Committee decided to do further work on their proposal before returning to Mission Council.
Previous relevant documents	Paper F from May 2013 Mission Council
Consultation has taken place with...	Many URC constituencies, as listed in the paper

Summary of Impact

Financial	Ongoing consultation and redrafting of the proposal are covered by the existing Mission Committee budget.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	



Mission Council – November 2013

Update on the CWM Mission Support Programme Phase 3

Introduction

The United Reformed Church Mission Committee started discussions on Phase 3 of the Mission Support Programme in October 2012. The Committee identified the need for evangelism and how to equip people in the United Reformed Church for this task (within the broader context of discipleship) as a focus to be explored for a new mission programme. The Committee also thought about how a consultation process with the church might take place. A small group (Andrew Willett, Janet Sutton Webb, Louise Franklin, Michael Jagessar and Francis Brienen) was asked to do further work and to report back to the Committee in February 2013.

The group met twice between October 2012 and February 2013, on both occasions joined by the CWM European Regional Secretary Wayne Hawkins, and also gathered information from the Synods about their past and current involvement in evangelism, at local and Synod level. Based on this, an initial proposal was developed for discussion by the Mission Committee and for subsequent consultation with potential stakeholders in the programme.

The proposal

The group formulated a proposal for a **three-stage process** with the overall aim to create a culture of evangelism in the United Reformed Church.

- The first stage focused on the leadership of the church at Assembly and Synod level and would start with initial research/mapping into what was already happening and consultation with the senior leadership of the whole church for strategic development and prayer. In this stage there would also be conversations with Synods focused on road shows and the setting up of Synod evangelism funds.
- Stage two would see part of stage one replicated at Synod level, with the aim to build vision and plan training. Training of trainers would take place, as would Synod road shows focused on evangelism. Materials would be developed for stage 3.
- In the third stage every church would be provided with material, such as a toolkit and leaflets, guides, booklets to give out etc. They would be encouraged to get involved in first base evangelism events, changing perceptions and making connections. This might lead to offering longer 'courses' such as Alpha, Christianity Explored, or something URC specific. Churches would feed back what they have done via the annual church returns.
- At the end there would be an evaluation and the start of MSP4 on deepening discipleship, the development of which would run alongside stage 2 and 3 of MSP3.

The Mission Committee discussed this initial proposal in February and agreed that it should be offered for wider consultation to potential stakeholders in a new programme. These included the Mission Council, Synod Moderators and Clerks, the Assembly Committees

and staff, the Resource Centres for Learning, the networks of Mission Enablers, Training and Development Officers and Children and Youth Development Officers, the Church Related Community Workers, FURY, various URC associated groups, ecumenical partners and selected world church partners. It was envisaged that after consultation the proposal would be revised and finalised for discussion and approval by the Mission Council in November 2013 and submission to CWM in December 2013.

The consultation process

The consultation was conducted from March to September 2013. An interim report was brought to the Mission Committee in June 2013 and highlighted a number of common themes and questions that had arisen from the responses received by then. The Committee considered the paper and affirmed the points raised. It concluded that there was much to wrestle with for the church, acknowledging the need for spiritual renewal and confidence in faith sharing. The MSP3 group was asked to consider the comments made and to report back, once the consultation process was finished.

The group met again in September and by then responses had been received from nearly all the groups and committees identified, and in addition to that from a number of individuals and local congregations. They confirmed and reinforced the five themes that had already been identified in the interim report in June. They were:

1. **Evangelism as a focus:** faith sharing with confidence was affirmed as important, but there was a mixed response as to whether evangelism should become the focus of our work in the next few years.
2. **Defining evangelism:** responses were divided over the need and the feasibility of reaching a shared understanding of evangelism.
3. **Methodology:** the proposal was seen by many as top down and the wisdom of a centrally introduced strategy was queried. There were also questions over the methodology of the proposed research.
4. **Initiative overload:** many expressed wariness about more programmes and training, and made a plea for recognising what we already have and starting there.
5. **Mapping:** there were questions over mapping as opposed to story telling/sharing and various suggestions to use instead the mapping we already do (e.g. through LMMR).

Several other common themes were also noted. They related to equipping and resourcing people, piloting whatever is developed, and doing in-depth research as groundwork.

However, a much bigger issue emerged. Many of the comments pointed to the need to start several steps back, at the stage of pre-evangelism. Though some of our churches are actively engaged in evangelism, many are not ready. This may be for a variety of reasons, but a recurring theme from the consultation responses related to people lacking confidence in their ability to give expression to/articulate their faith. And that translates into a lack of confidence in God. Enabling this confidence therefore is key and that would involve addressing the underlying questions as to why people are not more confident in God and discovering and practising ways of expressing one's faith with confidence – from actual lived experience. Ultimately, it is about discipleship, “making a lifelong commitment to working out what being a Christian means in the whole of life, in order to make a world-transforming difference”, as the Methodist Church describes it. Discipleship is at its most basic a response to the call to



follow Jesus, it embraces all our lives (personal and public), it is a life-long process and it is always a journey with others. It is about cultivating grateful and generous faith communities and ministries rooted in vibrant worship, knowledge of scripture, tradition, identity as URC Christians and as generous stewards of God's gifts. It is the living out of our baptismal life with the help of the Holy Spirit.

As a result the group suggested the following way forward to the Mission Committee:

1. To reshape the MSP3 and to focus it on pre-evangelism and deepening discipleship.
2. To expand the group to develop the proposal further, including someone from Westminster College, the Mission Enablers and/or Training and Development Officers network, a Synod Moderator, a colleague from the CTE Churches Group for Evangelisation and possibly others.
3. To task the current (small) group with developing a brief for the new and expanded group.
4. To draw on the mapping of the new Synod Evangelist in West Midlands, which will provide useful information for the new group.
5. To bring the new group together in February 2014 to start working on a revised proposal for consideration by the Mission Committee in May 2014.

This was accepted by the Mission Committee when it met in early October. Mission Committee also noted the importance of linking the development of the proposal with the Learning Church consultation and with the General Assembly theme.

